



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DRYDEN AFTER TWO CENTURIES (1700-1900).

THE year 1900 was the two hundredth anniversary of Dryden's death, as it was the five hundredth anniversary of Chaucer's, and viewed from to-day both Chaucer and Dryden are the most conspicuous figures in the closing decades of their respective eras, though, when this is said, the comparison must cease altogether in favor of the perpetual spring-tide of the earlier poet.

Dryden's literary work has permanent interest in three or four aspects. The order is not fortuitous, for one grows regularly out of the other. There is the poet's dramatic work, potboilers, which kept him for a long time alive. There is his prose work, critical dissertations, which he inserted as prefaces or introductions to his plays, discussing questions growing out of the plays, and investigating the nature and province of certain literary forms. From his dramatic and critical writing we pass naturally to his poetical satires and addresses, personal and political. And belonging to his old age, as the fruit of many poetical theories and much varied poetical practice, there are the translations and adaptations from the Latin satirists, as also from the tale-tellers of antiquity, Virgil and Ovid, and from the story-tellers of the Middle Age, Boccaccio and Chaucer. Quite alone stand the two short poems whereby he is best remembered, the two odes for St. Cecilia's Day. These last make Dryden's name a household word in English poetry; all else is largely mere material for the historian and special student of literature.

Briefly, as to Dryden's dramatic work. The return of Charles to the throne in 1660 opened the doors of the theater, closed for twelve years by Puritan ascendancy. It was a profligate drama that resulted, and yet in the comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, Farquhar, and most brilliant of all, Congreve, however licentious, can be seen a distinct product of English genius. How-

ever open to objections morally, as a literary form this drama of the Restoration was distinctly national—it grew out of the particular country and out of the particular age.

Dryden, with a certain impetuosity of genius, always his character, could easily outdo all others, and he forthwith accomplished this feat. Was it a profligate comedy of manners that was desired? Why, then he would supply it. Never of the highest original genius, yet constantly energetic and alert even to old age in breaking through upon new paths and achieving new successes, he set himself to work in the early sixties after Charles's return to fathering the new mode. Spanish and French sources were made to yield material for his purpose. One comedy, "The Wild Gallant," was followed by another, "The Rival Ladies"—both from dubious Spanish sources. Hard upon these followed "The Assignment, or Love in a Nunnery," whose title is sufficiently eloquent of its content, while a little later "Leimberham, or the Kind Keeper" actually had the notoriety of being prohibited as too indecent for Charles's indecent stage. Poor Dryden, with all his literary gifts, could not learn the courtier's and the man of the world's art of being indecent without being shocking, something not altogether, be it said, to his discredit. His tendency always to exaggeration succeeded merely in making him gross.

Nothing daunted, Dryden had meanwhile entered upon a new mode of writing. It was not only comedy the age demanded. Dryden now set himself to supply a new tragedy, and if he did not invent, he at least made fashionable the sort of tragic performance hereafter known as "the heroic play." "The Indian Queen," "The Indian Emperor," "Tyrannic Love, or the Royal Martyr," "Almanzor and Almahyde, or the Conquest of Granada" are some of the high-sounding titles of the plays of this category—plays filled with emperors and their queens, princes and princesses of far-away and incredible climes, with extravagant love episodes, with ghosts and supernatural beings and portents, with elaborate scenic effects, and a great strutting forth in language and representation. Here the couplet of five accents, the

well-known iambic pentameter, became confirmed in its name of "heroic." These were "heroic plays," and the vehicle of verse could be of no less magnitude. The "heroic couplet" Dryden stamps for evermore. And he does so in all seriousness. He writes a preface to one of his plays—"The Rival Ladies," above mentioned—and argues the superiority of the moderns of his own day over the ancients and over writers of Shakespeare's time. Dryden's "Essay of Dramatic Poesy," which followed hard upon these efforts, is the beginning of the modern critical attitude, and may be pronounced the most significant performance in criticism between Ben Jonson and Coleridge. But extravagant and impetuous Dryden always was. As in comedy, so in tragedy. The evident absurdities of these "heroic plays," in which emperors, long-lost children, lovers, supernatural agencies, wars, revolutions, and murders were all huddled together on a bombastic stage, could not forever escape ridicule. It was their spectacular appeal that caused them to hold the stage as long as they did. These extravagancies were in turn overthrown. The redoubtable George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, with a group of friends, wrote "The Rehearsal," a persiflage and a parody on the "heroic play." The hero is Drawcansir after Almanzor in the "Conquest of Granada." A poet appears as Bayes, an evident suggestion of the laurels of Dryden's official position; and to make it more personal, if possible, even Dryden's dress, walk, and accent were imitated. If the chivalry of Spain could be laughed away by the genius of a parody, much more easily could the heroic play in England. But not so Dryden himself. Dryden never refused to learn, never ceased to grow even to his last years, never hesitated to enlarge his views.

There is a period of transition, and later are new plays, new prefaces, with new canons of criticism, and a new spirit of work. If rhyme was before held indispensable, now blank verse is restored to its rightful superiority. If nature had been obscured by artifice, now the duty of the artist to follow and draw from nature and life is inculcated. If Shake-

speare had been hitherto slighted, now he is studied closely, and accepted as a model of style as Corneille is still held a model of structure. A bolder method of versification prevails with a narrower restriction on conceptions of place and time, or the so-called "unities."

In a new tragedy, "Aureng-zebe," Dryden has simplified the action, deepened the characterization, and convinced himself of the insufficiency of rhyme. While itself in rhyme, the play is preceded by a prologue, in which rhyme for tragic purposes is given up for the future. In this new spirit Dryden soon works over Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra." As every one with a modicum of genius who ventures to touch Shakespeare seems to find there his own best inspiration, so Dryden, in adapting "Antony and Cleopatra" for the stage of his day in illustration of his theories, while leaving no doubt of the unmeasurable superiority of the great Elizabethan, has given us perhaps his greatest dramatic success. Shakespeare's play is in five acts; Dryden's is condensed into three. Shakespeare's play pictures Antony as a complex human being in a number of relations, of which his passion for Cleopatra is but one; Dryden, seemingly catching "rare" Ben Jonson's idea of some particular "humor" dominating every mortal, emphasizes only the one trait of Antony's infatuation for "the serpent of Old Nile." Nevertheless, after all is said, Dryden's "All for Love, or the World Well Lost," following his newer and sounder theories of art and chastened, fuller experience, attains a power of characterization, a successful treatment of rhythm, and a dramatic and literary success that perhaps no other play of his approached. The only possible exception is "Don Sebastian," a work twelve years later, which followed out even maturer lines of critical doctrine. At last, in his preface to this play, Dryden attains, by a devious path from error into comparative truth, to the belief that poetic art is a following after nature and after life, and for this a suitable nobility of expression and sweetness of rhythm are necessary. Dryden knows, too, that literature is a historical growth and a national expression, and in recognizing the influence of envi-

ronment, or *milieu*, he anticipates the attitude of the great French critics, Taine and Brunetière.

Enough has already been said of the nature of Dryden's innumerable prose treatises. As a critic he follows Ben Jonson's "Timber, or Discoveries upon Men and Matter;" he prepares for Addison's criticism of Milton's "Paradise Lost" in the *Spectator* and for Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the English Poets" and literary dictatorship. In significance and actual critical importance he surpasses both, and in a history of English criticism Dryden remains the chief figure before the advent of a new era, that of Romanticism, and of its chiefest figure, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As one of Dryden's commentators has said: "What he wrote of Chaucer may be applied to himself. He is a fountain of good sense;" and Dr. Johnson, who was his disciple, called him "the father of English criticism."

No less significant is Dryden's vehicle for his criticism—his English prose style. While we deny to Dryden the greatest original genius, yet to understand his gifts in mere style we must remember that before his day there existed no smooth and flexible English prose. The "Euphues" of John Lyly set the Elizabethan fashion, a style full of fantastic conceits and mannerisms. In Dryden's day prose existed only for formal didactic purposes: for histories, travels, sermons, controversies. And the style of this seventeenth century prose was usually as learned as the content. However much we admire the sonorousness of Milton's and Jeremy Taylor's periods or the quaintness of Sir Thomas Browne, we must also recall how long and breathless many of their sentences are. It is a formal and full-dressed prose style, and not our familiar, direct, modern habit.

Dryden's service was here. He was the first to introduce the conversational method into English prose. In the Prefaces and Introductions to his plays he would talk familiarly to his audience and to his readers. If he was allied with the aristocracy of Shakespeare and Milton, with the court of Elizabeth and the first James and Charles, he was also related to the popular movement that had beheaded one

monarch and was now to dismiss a second. In an easy, confident manner he could address a people in whom was the court of last resort—that people who in the two centuries following Dryden's death have become all-powerful as the arbiter of destinies. It is this direct, conversational sort of prose that Dryden first freely gave English literature, that Steele and Addison used a decade or two later in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, and that succeeding generations have made universal.

Dryden is thus not only important in the history of English criticism; he is a landmark in the development of English prose style. In direct utterance he defends the use of rhyme in tragedy, and again as readily abandons it; with a few touches he aptly characterizes Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Ben Jonson; he contrasts the old dramatists and the new, and praises the superiority of the wit of Charles's day; he answers his critics or appeals to them on behalf of Virgil and Chaucer; and in his old age, the year before his death, he thanks those who "have encouraged Virgil to speak such English as I could teach him, and rewarded his interpreter for the pains he has taken in bringing him over into Britain, by defraying the charges of his voyage."

In this happy frame of mind, proud of his work and of his position, even though poor and oppressed in life, we may leave his dramas, his prose, and his translations, and address ourselves to the original poems that have given him his chief fame.

But first of all a word as to Dryden's favorite measure. Dryden's name is inseparably connected with the heroic couplet which he handed on to his follower Pope and their chorus of imitators throughout the eighteenth century. The history of this form of verse is interesting. It was the great adaptation and possibly invention of good master Geoffrey Chaucer, at the head of the stream of English song. Chaucer found it most happily suited for narrative and descriptive purposes in a majority of the "Canterbury Tales," and the matchlessly dexterous Prologue thereto. The Elizabethans used it somewhat, and notably Marlowe in his love story of

“Hero and Leander;” but at that time, in the late sixteenth century, Marlowe’s other “mighty line,” blank verse, carried all down before it. Chapman, who must have caught the trick from Marlowe in completing the unfinished “Hero,” used it in his “Odyssey.” Also the fountain head of the modern school of satire, Joseph Hall, found this couplet suitable for his purpose. But in the seventeenth century it is Edmund Waller who first makes isolated use of the couplet, and by concluding the sense with each pair forms a distinct distich. He had to wait nearly twenty years for a following in Denham’s descriptive poem of “Cooper’s Hill,” in 1641. It is in this poem, though not in its first form, descriptive of the natural surroundings of London and the valley of the Thames, that occurs the well-known couplet or distich expressly praised and evidently imitated by Dryden:

Tho’ deep, yet clear, tho’ gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage, without o’erflowing full.

Pope specifically praises

the easy vigor of a line,
Where Denham’s strength and Waller’s sweetness join.

Dryden used this couplet when, at the close of his life, he wished to reproduce Chaucer in modern guise, and also when he wished to tell anew the tales of Boccaccio and of those Latin poets akin to Boccaccio and Chaucer, Ovid and Virgil. It is the meter of all his tales and fables and the translations of his closing years. In the hands of Chaucer this form of verse was peculiarly liquid, running on in a continuous stream and in its clearness reflecting all the colors of the surrounding banks. Witness the “Knight’s Tale,” and the “Prologue,” and, indeed, four-fifths of the “Canterbury Tales,” that masterpiece of tale-telling in English verse. For merely giving a story continuously, and for powers of characterization, it served admirably, and Chaucer’s instinct was true. And Dryden’s is true in the conception and charm of execution in his fables and translations. For these are to be regarded as a species of tale-telling in verse and not as faithful reproductions of the original.

One can thus understand better what Dryden meant when he advocated the superiority of rhyme over blank verse. It was a time when blank verse had sunk almost to the looseness of prose, and, deeply influenced by Chaucer's successful example, he felt the charm of the flow as couplet was added to couplet. Why, indeed, should not a story thus flow on forever?

This is one use of the heroic couplet. But there is another. Instead of a continuous flow, the sense can come to an end with each couplet—something that becomes a mechanical tendency with this form of verse, except in the hands of a master. Each pair thus stands by itself and forms a distich. There occurs no flow at all, but instead there are detached comments, aphorisms, pithy sayings, proverbial expressions, epigrams, each complete in itself. This was the new use to which Hall, and especially Waller, put the couplet, and it remained the chief characteristic of this verse throughout the eighteenth century, until its tyranny was overthrown by the "Lyrical Ballads" of Wordsworth and Coleridge. It required the hearty and passionate outbursts of the Romantics to break through the cold aphoristic methods imposed so long by the force of Dryden and Pope.

For certain purposes this use of the couplet in aphoristic distichs is admirable. It is capable of polish to an unusual degree; but it is also artificial, and here lies its greatest danger as a medium for poetic art. It is peculiarly adapted to laudatory commendation and better still to sententious and scathing comments. Dryden's "Epistles" to sundry persons, not to name Pope's, are the greatest representatives we have of this class. For pungent satire it is admirable; and Juvenal could well be translated or adapted in this form by both Dryden and Dr. Johnson.

It is no accident, therefore, that the first poem that opens the Dryden volume is in heroic couplet, and the heroic couplet remains, with a very few exceptions, the form of verse Dryden uses in nine-tenths of his complete poetic work.

In this first poem, "Upon the Death of Lord Hastings," high-flown sentiments and exaggerations abound. It seems

that the gentleman died of smallpox on the eve of the day appointed for his marriage:

Was there no milder way but the smallpox,
The very filthiness of Pandora's box?

asks the poet. And the conceits continue:

Blisters with pride swelled, which through's flesh did sprout,
Like rosebuds, stuck i' the lily skin about;
Each little pimple had a tear in it,
To wail the fault its rising did commit.

These were the absurd artificialities which Dryden and Dryden's use of the couplet had to shake off before taking rank in the world of literature.

The "Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell" deserve special mention as not being in the heroic couplet. They are in quatrains—stanzas of four lines, rhyming alternately. We might call it the Gray's "Elegy" stanza, from its most illustrious example, but historians of literature refer to it as the Gondibert stanza, from a poem, "Gondibert," written by Sir William Davenant, who is still better known for carrying his adulation of Shakespeare to the extent that he wished to be thought a natural son of the great master—clearly a libel on both the honor of his mother and the poetical talent of his reputed father. There are a few lines in this early poem of Dryden's, otherwise without merit, which anticipate somewhat the slow and solemn movement and rhyme of Gray:

Nor died he when his ebbing fame went less,
But when fresh laurels courted him to live:
He seemed but to prevent some new success,
As if above what triumphs earth could give.

Dryden tries again this four-lined stanza in "Annus Mirabilis," a poem relating to the year 1666, memorable for the English struggles with the Dutch and the fire of London. There are still artificialities, conceits, and exaggerations a plenty, and Dryden is constantly digging for himself pitfalls of exaggerated absurdity. Take, for example, the extravagance of the description of a fierce naval contest:

Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball,
 And now their odors armed against them fly:
 Some preciously by shattered porcelain fall,
 And some by aromatic splinters die.

But it is not all so bad, it must be admitted. Conceited still, but nobler, is this picture of the river at the time of the great conflagration:

Old Father Thames raised up his reverent head,
 But feared the fate of Simois would return;
 Deep in his ooze he sought his sedgy bed,
 And shrunk his waters back into his urn.

And the stanzas devoted to "The King's Prayer," too long to quote here, reach a distinctly elevated strain. There are also in the poem references to nature—figures taken from sharp frosts, the falcon, and the eagle.

But Dryden returns again to the heroic couplet in "Astræa Redux," a poem on the happy restoration and return of his sacred majesty, Charles II., 1660. Artificiality and unreality cannot well go farther than here. It was this abuse, this untruthfulness that led to the ultimate rejection of the heroic couplet in our own century. It is the same meter adapted to the same exorbitant spirit of eulogy that is used in another poem, "To His Sacred Majesty: a Panegyric on His Coronation." What other meter or form of verse could suit the address to the Lord Chancellor Hyde, presented on New Year's Day, 1662? And how characteristically false, actually false and poetically false, it opens:

While flattering crowds officiously appear,
 To give themselves, not you, a happy year.

This shows at once the unusual facility of the heroic couplet for two very closely united functions: to cut deeply, to heap abuse, and leave no foot to stand upon; and on the other hand to praise extravagantly friends or favorites. For purposes of public addresses and of eulogy, or for purposes of scathing satire, the heroic couplet is peculiarly suited. No wonder it became Dryden's chief instrument of power. Two illustrations, one of each sort, stand side by side: "To Her Royal Highness, the Duchess," a eulogy, and a "Satire on the Dutch." The quotation is from the latter:

With an ill grace the Dutch their mischiefs do;
They've both ill nature and ill manners too.
Well may they boast themselves an ancient nation,
For they were bred ere manners were in fashion.

There has been some question whether Dryden or Mulgrave wrote "*An Essay upon Satire*," but there seems no question that it was Dryden, and not Mulgrave, who was stopped on the street and given a sound beating therefor, an episode which might have been taken from the fortunes of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

This practice in the heroic couplet for purposes of adulation and satire, and a score of years' practice in writing plays in the same measure at last prepared Dryden for a masterpiece of its kind. The man and the hour met. The form of verse was ready at hand, and the impelling spirit there too. This opportunity came in "*Absalom and Achitophel*," a poem published in 1681. The poem has the advantage in being a public satire, and not merely a personal invective. A whole state and age are indicted. The key fits easily in the lock, and the secret is soon revealed. Absalom is the Duke of Monmouth, the natural son of Charles, conspiring for the throne and supported by Achitophel, the Earl of Shaftesbury; Zimri is Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; Saul is Oliver Cromwell; David is Charles II.; and, in entire consonance therewith, Bathsheba is the Duchess of Portsmouth.

"*Absalom and Achitophel*" is undoubtedly the finest example of political satire in English literature. It shows how polished the heroic couplet can become for purposes of satire. The pictures are thrown off easily with a few strokes of black and white by a consummate artist. It was a bold pronunciamiento hurled into the camp of the enemy. How firm, how boldly sketched is the picture of the intriguing Earl of Shaftesbury, the chief hero, we might say, of the satire:

Of these the false Achitophel was first,
A name to all succeeding ages cursed:
For close designs and crooked counsels fit;
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,

Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
 In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;
 A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
 Fretted the pigmy body to decay,
 And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.
 A daring pilot in extremity,
 Pleased with the danger when the waves went high,
 He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,
 Would steer too nigh the sands to boast his wit.
 Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
 And thin partitions do their bounds divide.

There is nothing weak and doubtful here. This is clear knowledge of means and effect. Here is the conscious artist who knows what he is doing. In this sort of thing Dryden is supreme. The only legitimate criticism that can be made is on the sort of thing itself.

The picture of the Duke of Buckingham is a tardy but doubtless long-contemplated revenge for the parody in "The Rehearsal:"

A man so various, that he seemed to be
 Not one, but all mankind's epitome;
 Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
 Was everything by starts, and nothing long;
 But, in the course of one revolving moon,
 Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon.

Crisp use of the heroic couplet like this was something new to the literary world. The poem had a tremendous effect then, and it has lived since. A continuation was loudly and vigorously demanded, dealing with later political history. Part II. is, however, only in part Dryden's. Nahum Tate, a contemporary, who was also privileged to be numbered among the poets laureate of England, is the main author. But there can be no doubt of the wielder of the stinging pen that described Elkanah Settle, a poetaster of the time, under the guise of Doeg, or Dryden's rival Shadwell, as Og.

While Dryden began with the heroic couplet as early as 1650, it was not until after thirty years' practice that this perfect form was wrought. The vein was kept up. Shaftesbury was liberated, and in a spirit of exaltation his adherents struck off a medal in honor of the event. Dryden immediately responded. "The Medal: A Satire against Sedi-

tion" is directed against the Whigs, to whom one of Dryden's pointed prefaces is addressed. But lack of space forbids details, and I merely call attention to the poet's weapons and his growth in skill and art.

To pass from political to religious controversy in a day when religion and politics were one is a slight step; and, of course, the means must still be the highly polished and well-turned heroic couplet. "Religio Laici" and "The Hind and the Panther" are poems of this class, the latter taking rank as a religious allegory very much as "Absalom and Achitophel" as a political one. But it is purely as poetry, and not as philosophy or religion, that we can even glance at these two poems. Their skill is undeniable, something those frequently overlook who deny the conclusions or dismiss the attitude of the poet. "Religio Laici" perhaps contains the germ, certainly set the example, for Pope's "Essay on Man," itself a splendid example of both the strength and weakness of this same metrical form. Indeed, it was probably as much due to Dryden's change of faith as to his fame as a poet that Pope, the Roman Catholic lad, was first attracted to Dryden, and so came under his immediate influence. "The Hind and the Panther," in three books, is far more elaborated than the "Religio Laici." But for the general historian of English literature it is the first four or eight lines that are usually quoted, seemingly because placed at the beginning, and apparently little else is read and known. One couplet—

For truth has such a face and such a mien,
As to be loved needs only to be seen—

is the undoubted original of Pope's more famous passage in the "Essay on Man:"

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

There is no doubt whence Pope derived his use of the heroic couplet, making it, if possible, even more highly polished

and certainly more venomous, though never stronger, than Dryden.

Last of all Dryden's satires is "Mac Flecknoe," and again the inevitable couplet is the vehicle. "Mac Flecknoe" is as successful a personal satire as "Absalom and Achitophel" is political, and once more, as in a passage in the continuation of the former poem, Shadwell is the mark. The throne of Duncedom and Nonsense is vacant, and who shall succeed?

Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dullness from his tender years;
Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity;
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.

Again we have not far to seek whence Pope obtained the idea of his terrific "Dunciad."

Dryden's varied use of the heroic couplet is not yet complete. Allied to the satires are fourteen epistles directed to sundry persons of importance. Whether for adulation or blame, for criticism or the discussion of some public polity, the frame of mind is much the same and the same meter is still used. Only one uses the Hudibrastic measure and is thus distinguished from the others. Epistle Tenth, "To My Dear Friend, Mr. Congreve, on His Comedy Called 'the Double Dealer,'" reveals the complacent attitude of the Restoration age toward the Elizabethan. The advance over the commendatory verses first discussed, which passed into absurdities, may be clearly seen. We are at last on safe, even if not on consecrated, ground.

Only a glance can be given to another form of verse attempted by Dryden: the funeral ode or the elegy. "Threnodia Augustalis, a funeral Pindaric poem sacred to the happy memory of King Charles II.," is artificial. As one of Dryden's commentators says, about all it is able to state is that "the king died hard." Really successful, however, is the "Ode to the Pious Memory of the Accomplished Young Lady, Mrs. Anne Killigrew."

There are a few other attempts of Dryden's, but this will

suffice to bring us to our concluding point. Dryden is not a lyric poet *per se*. His qualities, his meters, his training, all point in another direction. The spontaneity of the song was denied to him. Yet the funeral ode or elegy to Mrs. Anne Killigrew calls attention to a form in which he did succeed on two exceptional occasions—in giving expression to the exalted state of mind requisite for the ode. The ode is impassioned, the ode is irregular, the ode is a law unto itself. It follows its own bent—an unknown higher law of its own. It is like a Greek chorus; it is the Greek chorus. After it is written you may trace, perhaps, its musical path and metrical movement; but beforehand you cannot dictate its ways, because you cannot control its passions. Yield to joy, and you have the marriage ode of Spenser's "Epithalamium" and "Prothalamium." Yield to grief and the reflections loss calls forth, and you have a "Lycidas," provided there is a Milton to write it; or there is an "Ode to Mrs. Anne Killigrew," if you have only a Dryden. There is need only to name the comparison of these two poems at once to mark the distance between them. In the ode movement is irregular, rhyme is irregular, length of line, stanzaic form, all are irregular; but the emotion, whatever it be, the exaltation, is one, now soaring aloft and now swooping, but only to rise again, and as in Shelley's "Skylark" to mingle earth with heaven.

Following the elegies, in the last years of his life Dryden tried his hand upon two odes, ten years apart, in 1687 and 1697. Both are upon the same subject: a celebration of St. Cecilia's Day and the exaltation of music. Both are written to be sung, sung in chorus, in enthusiastic and exalted praise of music and poesy—the art, one might say, in which Dryden had spent his whole life. The poet speaks from his deepest convictions and is carried to a glow of the highest enthusiasm. With the greatest success Dryden reproduces the varied effects of various musical instruments and of differing poetical moods, using mere words for material. In the first song are varied meters for the trumpet, the drum, the flute, the violin, and, last of all, the organ, the reputed invention of St. Cecilia.

“Alexander’s Feast, or the Power of Music,” is still more successful. Peculiarly fitted to music, the ode suggests all the varied movements of a symphony as it calls forth different emotions and passions. It is the godlike notes, the bacchanalian revels, the feeling of pity, the praise of love, the madness of revenge, the poet passes in review in his shaping imagination. Collins’ related “Ode on the Passions” evidently harks back to this original. We read the stanzas of this poem, and we do not wonder at the enthusiasm of the remark attributed to Dryden himself, characteristic of the conceit of the age, and so of the man: “It is the best ode ever written or that ever will be written”—a remark possibly true still in the bounds of our English poetry, if we except Wordsworth’s grand organ roll on “Immortality.” The change in meters, the varied lengths of lines and stanzas, the varying metrical effects in pauses and movements—all go to make it one of our most remarkable English poems.

For use of heroic couplet in satire and personal addresses, for use of the same measure for very different effects in the tales and translations, for the dramas and the prefaces to the dramas, Dryden will always be known; but a reading of all these may be confined to the student of literature. For every one who cares for poetry at all, the glory of our English poetry—and our poetry is the chiefest glory of our English literature and race—Dryden’s two odes for St. Cecilia’s Day pass into the common inheritance of that literature and race.

JOHN BELL HENNEMAN.